

Rep. Jim Steineke and Sen. Roger Roth: All-mail ballot proposal: return to sender

By Jim Steineke and Roger Roth | Assembly Majority Leader and Senate President, Wisconsin Legislature Apr 20, 2020

STEVE APPS — State Journal



By Jim Steineke and Roger Roth | Assembly Majority Leader and Senate President, Wisconsin Legislature

We've heard it time and time again: these are unprecedented times. Heck, we've even said it a time or two... or 10. For most of us, an epidemic the size, scale and severity of the novel coronavirus is something we've never experienced before.

Our schools are closed, our grocery stores are frenzied, and many of us are now navigating the new reality of teaching our children through a computer while managing 10-person (or more) conference calls daily. In just a few months, our worlds have been turned upside down.

And yet, from a historical perspective, the pandemic we're now experiencing falls in line with so many others our world has faced. Even just looking at the past 100 years or so, the coronavirus has been likened to the Spanish Flu in 1918, the Hong Kong flu of the '60s, and the swine flu of 2009.

While we of course need to make adjustments to our everyday lives to help flatten the curve for COVID-19 and keep our health care workers, elderly, and most vulnerable safe, making sweeping changes to our most basic right, voting, should be the last thing we consider, especially given the flexibility of Wisconsin's current system.

New legislation has called for a ballot to be mailed to every registered voter in Wisconsin for future elections — a knee-jerk reaction to a problem that, frankly, does not exist. As legislative leaders in the state Assembly and Senate, it's our job to vet bills that come across our desks. It is clear to us both that this proposal will create more problems than it might solve.

First and foremost, we already have in place a very easy process to vote absentee now. Wisconsinites can request an absentee ballot by mail, in person, or online; no matter who you are or where you live, there is every available opportunity to vote from the comfort of your own home. In fact, the ease of voting from home was something legislators and Gov. Evers repeatedly advertised to constituents during these uncertain times. With a record number of absentee ballots being cast in our spring election, it's clear those efforts were largely successful.

As northeastern Wisconsin legislators, we don't have to look far to see the faults that an all-mail balloting process could bring us. Oshkosh and Appleton had literal bins of ballots that were never delivered; other communities experienced ballots being delivered late. As we search for answers from the United States Postal Service as to how these ballots were never mailed, it's clear that snafus like these don't bode well for a national election that typically turns out far more voters than we saw last week. If we eliminate in-person voting as Democrats suggest, there would be no recourse for those that didn't receive a ballot.

The Democratic proposal also has another critical flaw. The legislation eliminates security measures in place to ensure that the voter is who they say they are. Not only does the legislation propose eliminating voter ID, a commonsense measure supported by a vast percentage of Wisconsinites, it also eliminates the requirement that a witness sign the ballot before it is returned. One doesn't have to think long and hard to imagine the level of fraud that could take place without these in place.

From a higher-level view, the most important part of any election is that the electorate has faith in the results — it's the foundation democracy is built on. Turning to an all-mail ballot election would severely undercut the trust we can have in the authenticity of election results.

We all know that people move, change their names, and more between elections — everyday life doesn't stop just because of an election cycle. Yet this presents the obvious problem of ballots being sent to the wrong address, voters receiving more than one ballot, etc. The integrity of upholding “one person, one vote” becomes much more challenging.

Ultimately, moving to an all-mail ballot is not only an unnecessary move, it's a harmful one. Instead, we should focus on the ways we can ensure our current in-person voting options are as safe as possible while ensuring our absentee voting options remain easy and trustworthy.

Voting early means being able to skip the lines and avoid large crowds. Registering to vote early or when you've had a life change that necessitates re-registering will make voting easier and quicker. Requesting an absentee ballot proactively will reduce the foot traffic on Election Day. We encourage everyone to sign up for absentee ballots now, for every election this year. All of these options — all already in place, tried, and true — will mean we can provide in-person voting to those that need, or want, it in the safest way possible.

While these are unprecedented times, we know that Wisconsinites are hearty and resilient. Just like in challenging times throughout our state's and country's history, we will endure and come out of this on the other side, stronger for it. Our elections laws should do the same.

Rep. Jim Steineke, R-Kaukauna, is the majority leader of the Wisconsin Assembly. Sen. Roger Roth, R-Appleton, is the president of the Wisconsin Senate.

*Share your opinion on this topic by sending a letter to the editor to **tctvoice@madison.com**. Include your full name, hometown and phone number. Your name and town will be published. The phone number is for verification purposes only. Please keep your letter to 250 words or less.*
